

Transcript: Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on the Army, Fort Hood

Transcript courtesy of Federal News Service

SECRETARY JOHN MCHUGH: Obviously, as you noted, Mr. Chairman, this longstanding posture hearing is being held now under a shadow of the tragic events that happened just yesterday afternoon at Fort Hood. As I know you all understand, any time the Army loses a soldier, we all mourn. When that loss comes at the hands of another soldier, and indeed when that event occurs at the very place that suffered so much pain, so much anguish just four and a half years ago, it only adds to the sorrow and the all-consuming sense of loss the Army is feeling this day.

Our first responsibility, as I know you share, is to the families of the fallen, also to those of course who have been wounded and those close to them, their family, their loved ones, as they make their way hopefully on a road to full recovery. Our thoughts and prayers but most importantly our actions and our every effort will be with those families, will be with those survivors, whatever the struggle. We have ordered all possible means of medical and investigatory support as well as added behavioral health counselors. I want to give a tip of the hat to VA Secretary Rick Shinseki who immediately reached out and offered any support from the Veterans Administration in respect to needed personnel. And in speaking, as both the chief and I did late last evening to Lieutenant General Mark Milley, for the moment the immediate needs seem to be met, but we're going to monitor that very carefully.

As I know all of you recognize, this is an ongoing investigation and one that occurred just 15 or so hours ago. And even at this point, the circumstances remain very fluid, but we recognize we owe this committee particularly, but also this Congress, the facts, what we know and when we know it. And I want to promise all of the members here this morning that we will work with you as we go forward together so that we can effectively -- you can effectively discharge your oversight responsibilities.

If I may, Mr. Chairman, I'd also like to take a brief opportunity to say to the Fort Hood community and to the Army family worldwide, this is a time once again to come together, to stand as one as they had so many times before, drawing strength from each other. As this committee knows so well, the past 13 years have been fraught with much loss, with much pain, much suffering. But through it all, men and women of the United States Army, their families, the civilians who support them have come through the storm together, and I know, as we have in the past, will come out the other side of this tempest poorer for the losses but stronger through our resolve.

Mr. Chairman, I can take a moment now to give you the updates that you've requested and then defer to the chief for the purpose of the posture statement, if you'd like.

SEN. LEVIN: That'd be fine, thank you.

SEC. MCHUGH: Based on our discussions last evening with Lieutenant General Mark Nilley and a subsequent conversation I had about 10:45 with the secretary of defense, these are the facts

as we understand them. But again, things are changing at this moment. The specialist, the alleged shooter involved joined the United States Army in June of 2008. When he first enlisted in the Army, he was an 11 Bravo; that's an infantry soldier, as most of you know. He later, upon reupping, transferred his MOS to an 88 mike, a truck driver. We are tracking at the moment that he did have two deployments, including one four-month -- approximately four-month deployment to Iraq. As a truck driver, his records show no wounds, no involvement -- direct involvement in combat; as General Milley, said no record of Purple Heart or any injury that might lead us to further investigate a battle-related TBI or such. He was undergoing a variety of treatment and diagnoses for mental health conditions ranging from depression to anxiety to some sleep disturbance.

He was prescribed a number of drugs to address those, including Ambien. He was seen just last month by a psychiatrist. He was fully examined. And as of this morning, we had no indication on the record of that examination that there was any sign of likely violence, either to himself or to other, no suicidal ideation. So the plan forward was to just continue to monitor and to treat him as deemed appropriate.

The alleged weapon was a 45 caliber that the soldier had recently purchased. He lived off post. We tried to do everything we can to encourage soldiers to register their personal weapons. Even when they live off post, we are not legally able to compel them to register weapons when they reside off post. But the minute that soldier brought that weapon on to the post, it was not registered, and it under our rules and regs being utilized obviously illegally and with not proper clearance or foreknowledge by the command. He is married. His wife was being questioned. The last I was informed last evening, they're natives to Puerto Rico.

Again, the background checks we've done thus far show no involvement with extremist organizations or any kind. But as General Milley said to me last evening, and I know the chief and I fully support, we're not making any assumptions by that. We're going to keep an open mind and an open investigation, and we will go where the facts lead us, and possible extremist involvement is still being looked at very, very carefully. He had a clean record in terms of his behavioral -- no outstanding bad marks for any kinds of major misbehaviors that we're yet aware of.

So you know the conditions of those who were involved in the incident. There were three victims who have tragically lost their lives. The other killed in action in that -- in that moment was the shooter, who took his own life when confronted by a military police officer, a female -- 16 others wounded, three that were considered critical, the others of varying severity but considered by and large stable. But we obviously are going to continue to make sure they get the best of care because we want to ensure absolutely that no bad thing comes out of this more than it already has. So that is pretty much what we know at this moment, chairman.

SEN. LEVIN: Thank you very much, Secretary.

SEC. MCHUGH: And it it's appropriate, I'll yield to the chief or -- for the posture comments.

SEN. LEVIN: General?

GENERAL RAYMOND ODIERNO: Chairman, if I could just add a few comments. First, once again, we talk a lot in the Army that we have an Army family, and we've lost young people who are part of our Army family, and we take incredibly serious.

For me, this is close to home. I've spent a lot of time at Fort Hood personally. I was a brigade commander, division commander and a corps commander at Fort Hood. I understand the resilience of that community, the resilience of the people there, how proud the soldiers are of what they do. And we will do everything we can to ensure they continue to move forward.

I would just say that I believe that some of the procedures that have been put in place following the incident 4 1/2 years ago did help us yesterday. The alert procedures that were in place, the response, the training that has gone into the response forces that responded I think contributed to making this something that could have been much, much worse.

So we will continue to monitor the force of the Army, and the resources of the Army will be behind Fort Hood. We are very confident in the leadership of Mark Milley, who is -- I think as many of you know just returned from Afghanistan as the commander of the corps over there and is a very experienced commander, and we will continue to support them.

The only thing I would add to the facts that the secretary provided, that this was an experienced soldier. He spent actually nine years in the Puerto Rico National Guard before coming on active duty. So he's a very experienced soldier, had a -- had a one-year deployment to the Sinai with the National Guard and then had a four- month deployment in Iraq.

It was the last four months at the end of 2011, from August to December, 2011. We will continue to work and work through this issue and continue to investigate. And as we do that, we will provide information to all.

The only other thing I'll say is there's great interagency cooperation. The FBI has provided significant assistance, as well as the State of Texas, as well as the Veterans Affairs, as the secretary pointed out. So we will continue to work this. We have an incredibly talented, resilient Army. We'll be incredibly -- we'll continue to be incredibly resilient and move forward, but we are also -- reach out to our family -- the victims and the families of our victims of this tragic incident.

And that's all I have. If you want me to continue, I will continue with my statement.